

The Last Dragon

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Rain...Rain...The sky needs more rain....

Rain was all Ink thought about as he glared resentfully into the cloudless sky. Too weary to even lift his head all the way up any more, he slumped down. His nose was once again pressed back into darkness.

He closed his eyes to sleep, but not to rest. No, never to rest.

His tail swished slowly on the ground behind him, pushing up more dirt and filth, coating his scales. It didn't matter any more. What was another layer of filth on his body?

Ink had grown accustomed to being coated in a constant layer of dirt and grime. It was no better than he deserved.

No better than he would ever get.

It had all been taken, even the sky.

Rain....

She had such beautiful wings. They were as black as her sleek body, but instead of the shining silver flecks that covered her body in a gentle shower of metal rain, whole silver veins flashed through the membrane of tough black skin, like lightning shooting through her blood.

And she was fast, incredibly fast.

Shooting through the sky like a giant dark arrow, nothing could stop her. She could beat the wind in a race, and wasn't afraid to tell the world, roaring proudly as she whipped her tail over the clouds.

She was everything Ink wanted to be as he trailed behind. Her laughter was clear as he finally caught up.

"You're getting better." She rumbled casually when he finally reached her. Her wings were folded lightly over her back as she sat relaxed on the cliff's edge. She blinked lazily, silver eyes twinkling with excitement that her calm posture didn't give away.

"Not good enough yet." Ink growled back, flicking at her affectionately with the tip of his tail.

"True." She purred, sounding like a self satisfied cat. She nonchalantly licked at her claws, keeping her eyes on him. He grinned and sat down beside her, folding his own wings carefully.

The setting sun sent a shimmering red glow over their bodies, turning Ink's white scales pink and making his black scales seem to shift like a being alive.

It was quiet, just the sound of them breathing as they watched the sky.

It was perfect, just the two of them.

He could feel her hearts beating, he was sitting so close to her. It was soothing, to feel her blood moving so close to his, to hear her breathing slide so easily.

She was alive, with him, and would stay that way forever.

He was sure of it.

Ink glared, squinting as sun rose, shining into the dark space of his cage. He growled unhappily as he retreated farther back, staying in the dark.

Cursed dreams.

The sun seemed to burn brightly, taunting him through the bars. He hissed and turned away, blinking furiously. Morning was a time he hated, almost as much as he hated sunset. The sky was still cloudless, and the sun seemed to make it a point to shine directly in his eyes. Ink stayed back in the darkness of his cage, even as his 'caretaker' dropped food in carelessly, letting the meat roll over in the grime of his cage. He stayed there for a long time, just glaring at the proffered food with hatred. Of course, he needed to eat eventually. He stepped forward reluctantly to wrap his jaws around the bitter, filthy tasting meat. He dragged it to the very back of the cage, choosing to eat in dark silence and solitude.

"Did you see that?! My first real kill!" Ink looked excitedly at the bloody deer in front of him, licking the blood off his lips. The smile she gave him made his heart grow warmer. "Indeed. Good job." She looked over his prey carefully and admiringly, and it filled his heart with pride, making him purr. She smiled wider. "A big enough dinner for the both of us. Well done. Let's take it somewhere more private, shall we?" Ink nodded eagerly, putting his jaws back around the deer's neck and started dragging it away with difficulty. It was almost too big for him to put his jaws all the way around it, making it hard, but not impossible. She walked along with him, patiently and silently. She kept smiling. It made Ink smile back, even though he was carrying their dinner. "Can't wait to taste my hatchmate's first kill." She said quietly. "It's a momentous occasion. Now I don't have to hunt alone." Ink wanted to reply, but he kept his careful grip on the deer's neck until he had pulled it back to the cave, glowing and wriggling with excited pride. Not only had he killed it, but he had brought it back himself. His smug grin was almost big as her happy one. "Can we eat it now?" He asked excitedly. "Hey, you're the killer. You get to decide." She leaned in close, eyes twinkling. "Let's eat!" He started to dig in, feasting heartily. After a few bites, he realized she wasn't eating as well. He looked up, a piece of bloody meat hanging from his tooth. "Hey, don't you want some? It's delicious!" She smiled gently but didn't move. "Nah, you get first cut, Ink. You're the hunter, you earned it." Ink grinned. His tail swished pleasantly and his heart swelled. "Whatever you say. It really is delicious, the most tasty deer I've ever eaten!"

Ink suddenly lost his appetite and tossed aside his half-eaten chunk of dirty, bitter meat. It hit the side of the cage with a dull sound and rolled pathetically on the dirt. Ink watched it dully, eyes empty. *You need to eat to live....But living in the dark isn't really living, is it? I suppose I'm dead now....* Ink crouched low, feeling the confines of the cage around him like dark barriers that seemed to suck out light and life. Not that he had any left. "Look at 'im. Jus' look at 'im!" Ink had gotten too used to taunting to turn and growl at whoever it was. "Yeah. Sad, ain't it?"

"Yeah, I guess. Last of 'is kind, they say. Real sad."

Ink wanted to growl, but he just closed his eyes and lowered his head. He'd just wait for these boys to leave, to just leave him in peace.

"The last dragon, livin' out 'is days in a cage. How pathetic."

Ink tensed up, but didn't react. It was true, all of it.

Last of my kind....The last dragon....

He heard it all the time, every day at least once. He still didn't need it though, to realize he was pathetic, a broken remnant of a great race. He knew. He already knew.

But why did it still hurt so badly?

Ink couldn't sleep that night. Something nagged at him, and he couldn't sleep. No, it wasn't something he ate. The deer was resting just fine in his belly, settling comfortably. No, it wasn't his sleeping spot. He had fought her for it and succeeded in getting to lie on the soft moss that grew in the cave. It wasn't much of a mattress, but it felt much nicer than the plain rock.

It was something he thought.

He rolled over and stood up, tail twitching. Hesitantly, he made his way to her sleeping form.

"Hey, wake up." He hissed softly. "Wake up."

"What is it Ink...?" She mumbled blearily, slowly flicking her eyes open to look up at him.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure...I guess."

He nodded and crouched down beside her, lying still for a moment.

"Well? Come on, I do want to sleep."

"I just wanted to know....Are we really the last dragons alive?" The question was slow and thoughtful, much pondered. And very fearful.

She went silent for a few moments. He was almost afraid she fell asleep again. But then she let out a rumbling sigh.

"No, Ink. We are not the last ones."

"No? Then where are the others? Can we go see them?"

"Ink...I wish we could. But I don't know where they are."

"Then how do you know we're not the last ones?"

"I just do. I just know."

"But how?"

She went quiet.

"I know...Because I do. We can't possibly be the last ones, no matter what humans think. They can't kill off us dragons, that's just silly. We're more powerful than that. We won't let ourselves die. Our race will live on." She smiled tiredly at him, putting her head back down on the stone floor.

Ink thought for a second, sitting still beside her.

"We have to find them."

"I guess we do..." She started to close her eyes again, drooping sleepily.

"We will find them, I know it." He settled down beside her, pressing against her side. A tiny smile flickered over her mouth.

"Yeah...We will..."

"Together."

"Together..."

"And we will not be the last ones."

Her smile got bigger and she kept her eyes open for one moment longer.

"No, we won't."

Blast it all, I hate sunset...

Ink growled to himself, flinching away from the red light as the sun slowly faded away. The 'caretaker' had come and gone, leaving another chunk of flesh that was to be considered 'food'.

Ink let it lie where it had fallen.

He still had no appetite.

He watched the sunset in silence, somber and dull.

A bird swooped down in front of his cage and stayed there. Annoyed, he waited a few seconds, but it remained. After a few more minutes of watching it hop and bob around, he growled impatiently at it. It flew off with a start, a burst of feathers shooting back up into the sky. It flew off, Ink's gaze still on it.

He twitched, his tail swishing out an agitated rhythm.

Such wings....

His stomach tightened, and he almost retched up the small amount of food he had eaten that day.

Wings....

He growled again and curled in on himself.

Blood red light poured over him as he squeezed his eyes shut and flicked his tail over his eyes.

"You'll never catch up!" Her whoop of delight was like music. Her voice was whipped back to him by the roar of the wind.

"We'll see about that!" He called. Her laugh was carried back to him. He put on a burst of speed. Red light was pouring over them, illuminating their race against the sky.

She twirled around, pulling her dark wings close to her for a moment before straightening them out again, gliding over on the wind and grinning as she tucked her legs up into her chest. Ink flapped his wings a few times, nearly catching up with her easy glide.

"Good, good! You were almost on my tail!"

Those words were practically sung out as she went into a graceful dive, swooping and twisting in perfect, elaborate loops and rolls.

No bird or cloud could ever hope to compete with her.

Ink watched her, grinning as wide as always. The fading light shone over his pale wings, glinting and making them glitter. He tossed back his head gleefully, enjoying the feel of the wind on him. It slid easily over him, like a familiar friend that welcomed him with open arms into the sky.

This... This was what he was born for.

Air rushed up around him as he dropped into a sudden dive, closing his eyes.

The sky belonged to him, it was his home. He fit up here just as much as clouds, birds, stars, the moon, even the sun.

He was *supposed* to be there, no doubt.

It was the perfect sensation, to fly and breathe and live with her in the fading sun...

Ink didn't open his eyes again until he felt the sun leave, disappearing from sight and leaving him in peace.

Cursed sun.... Only a reminder....

On his back, scarred, crooked stumps were all that remained of his snowy white wings. The wings he was born with, the wings that gave him the sky, that made him a rival to the very sun. Gone.

Stolen.

By the wretched humans that kept him in this cage.

Not that he longed for freedom. Those days were past, long past. He didn't want to be released any more, and he was tired of seeing the sky.

It was no longer his. He could no longer slide easily through it, embracing the wind like a friend or caressing the clouds like a lover. He couldn't swim through its endless cool blue length, no matter how hard he wished. Not any more. No matter what he could try. It would only fail.

What is a dragon without wings? Nothing...As good as dead...A broken shadow....

His bitter thoughts were a weary parade night after night, day after day, imprinted the same way every time.

The last dragon is only a shadow....A broken shadow....

The stars seemed to laugh at him. The moon just stared down, serene. The dry air infuriated him. It was too calm, why was it so calm?

He did not want calm, not ever again.

Rain....That is all I want....Rain...

It had been quiet when they returned. Not the peaceful calm of the forest settling in for sleep, but dead silence. She had been suspicious before they even touched the ground.

"Ink...Ink!" She called out to him as he started to pad back towards the cave.

"What?" He turned his neck to look at her, blue eyes still laughing. The laugh faded when he saw confusion. He stopped in his tracks.

"Hear that?"

Ink strained, listening closely. He huffed in frustration.

"I don't hear anything." He started padding off again.

"Exactly." She raised her head, sniffing the air with a worried look. "What's that smell?"

Ink sniffed as well, pausing again. "Hm. You're right. It does smell funny. What is it?"

She shook her head, taking a step back. "I don't know. I have a bad feeling. We should leave."

"Leave? But we just got back." Ink sniffed again, taking a few steps forward. "Besides, it smells tasty to me."

"I don't like it. Come on Ink. Let's go." She started to turn away. Ink didn't follow.

"You can go. I want to find out what smells so good."

"Ink! Don't!" She turned back, hurrying to catch up. She stepped in front of him, blocking his path with her long, lithe body. "Come on, we'll find a new place to sleep."

"But I want to find out what that smell is." He stubbornly pushed past her, getting closer and closer to the cave. She frantically following, gaze darting around and muscles bunching. Ink ignored her with a roll of his eyes.

He gingerly stepped in front of the cave and peered in.

It was as dark as ever.

He was mildly disappointed when he realized the tantalizing scent had gone. He turned to look back at her, grinning smugly.

"See? Nothing to worry about. The smell's even."

He was cut off by a chain twisting around his neck.

Without warning, humans had started pouring out of the cave, climbing over him and pulling chains over his body.

His eyes widened with panic and realization.

"Ink!" He heard her roar out his name, but he could no longer see her as the humans poured out over him like an endless torrent of violent, living water, pinning him down and chaining him up.

"Ink!" Her bellow was closer this time, and he felt some of the humans on him get swept off by her. He was finally able to see her, snarling and growling and roaring as she shot off her lightning bursts of fire, fighting with claws, teeth, wings and flame. The humans could be no match for her, never. He started to struggle again, roaring and screaming as loudly as her. His claws were pinned down, but his teeth weren't. The humans couldn't beat them. They were no match, no matter how many of them there were, for these two dragons. But suddenly, something changed. Her shrieks of anger and fire turned into wails of pain, bellows of agony. He looked up at her and his body froze. Time seemed to slow as he watched blood well up and spurt from her back and chest, two swords thrust in to the hilt, disappearing into her body and running red with her blood. Something clawed it's way up into his chest. He wriggled in his chains, fighting desperately as something dark and sick poured into him. She was all he had, she was everything to him. His hatchmate and sister from the very day he was an egg, his protector, his teacher, his only friend besides the sky. A sword in her back, and one sprouting from her chest, where her hearts were. He heard her wail one last time, his name travelling out on a dying breath as she fell to the ground with a sickening sound. "Ink...." His limbs suddenly felt heavy, hard to move right. He jerked in silenced shock for a moment before releasing a hellish scream. "No! No! Rain! Nooooo!"

Ink sat up sharply, shaking his head. *Memories...Memories...Why won't they just leave me alone..?* The cramped space prevented him from pacing, the way he used to deal with bad dreams. When he was free. He didn't want to close his eyes. If he closed his eyes, he would only see images that he did not want to see, things that he had already lived through yet still refused to die. Images that waited on the other side of his eyes. He looked out of the cage bars and stared hard at the sky. He was supposed to be up in that sky, cutting through it with the ease that only a dragon could have. But now, he was broken. Freedom couldn't be his ever again. And he didn't want it anymore. To be free again had become a loathing of his. He longed for the sky, but could never have it again. So to live outside of a cage and be 'free' wasn't the freedom of a dragon. That may have been freedom for the humans, but they had never tasted the sky or breathed in the stars the way he did. They had never felt the sun so close, or had the wind fight them for space, or touched through clouds and bathed in lightning and rain. *Rain....Rain....* His eyes went up to the stars. They seemed so far away now. Dimmer, and not as beautiful as they had been when he practically lived among them. The skies were his home, but now he had nothing. A shudder travelled up the length of his tail and through his body, leaving a dull ache in him. He felt hollowed out, but that was nothing new. He had been hollowed out for many years.

The pain was blinding.

Ink shrieked and clawed at the air, struggling to be free from this pain. It wouldn't go away, the agony stayed, seeming to get worse and worse until the tangible pain seemed to crush Ink's entire body.

The sword came down again, and blood spurted as Ink let out a roar, struggling against too thick chains. The sound of his own heartbeat nearly drowned out the sound of cold laughter. Something heavy fell to the ground with a sick wet slap, and his shoulder suddenly felt much lighter.

The laughter got louder and colder.

Ink keened sharply and continued struggling, battering his own body as he tried to free himself. His tail whipped frantically, and he felt it make contact with one of the humans, flinging it away. He roared again, feeling his own blood slide in hot streams down his back and splattering over his severed wing lying broken, limp and lifeless on the ground.

No... This isn't supposed to happen!

He struggled even harder, roaring and screaming and thrashing as he strained against the chains, even cutting himself and rubbing away scales in his desperation.

He bellowed with pain and despair as he felt the sword beginning to bite down on his remaining wing, his quickly vanishing link to the sky.

Bone splintered, skin and scales were split. Blood spilled.

Still, Ink fought.

He fought and continued fighting even as the last of his wing was chopped away and the agony that burned through his body also throbbed over and over in his mind.

No..No...NOOOO!!!!

A bellow escaped him, and fire roared to life in his mouth, bursting out in blue tongues of intense heat. Still to no avail. The cold laughter continued, and so did the swift blows of the sword.

Cutting away everything he had, cutting away what was left.

The sky was stolen from him now, gone with his broken wings.

The world in front of him was blurring into one sick, twisted painting.

"Collect the tears too. Dragon tears are valuable on most markets, and are certainly valuable to me." The laughter stopped, replaced by a cold voice.

Ink's head jerked, and he twisted his neck to try and see the cruel human who spoke.

Instead, all he saw was Rain's bloody and lifeless corpse sprawled out beside him, silver eyes open but dead. His blood mixed with hers in a pool beneath them.

As if in some kind of cruel joke, his wings had landed on her, spread over her body the way he would put them over her on cold nights.

More tears blurred his vision as he stared into her empty eyes.

A choked roar escaped his throat, along with more flame jumping to life in front of him.

Hatred burned in that cold blue fire, matching the fire burning in his eyes.

The chains held him back, kept himself from launching himself forward to tear apart her killer.

A man who was now standing on Rain's outstretched wing, smirking mirthfully at Ink's display of fire.

"How sad." He kept walking over her wing, stepping on her body, walking all over her lifeless form with boots covered in blood and dirt. He left a disgusting trail all over her.

Desecrated her.

And there was nothing Ink could do about it.

The man stood well out of the way of Ink's leaping flames, and the chains kept him pinned down so he couldn't take the disgusting human between his teeth and tear him apart.

His vision blurred again, and he felt more chains twist around his neck and then pulled tight, abruptly cutting off the flames and Ink's air.

As he gasped for breath, he heard shouts and the clink of chains.

And he heard laughter.

Cold, heartless laughter.

I am going to die now...They are going to kill me...I'll join Rain in the sky...

The squeezing continued, and his vision started to go black. He felt himself being dragged away. He struggled, but only a little.

The last thing he saw before his eyesight failed him and everything went black was Rain's twisted face.

The sky needs Rain....

Ink jolted himself awake. He hadn't even remembered falling asleep. But he remembered waking up.

Another dream.

Cursed dreams. They came back over and over again, every night. He rolled over to look out the bars of the cage. It was still night, but now the moon was covered over by clouds. He rolled the stumps on his shoulders, feeling the ache that the abruptly shortened bones had, as if they longed to have wings back as much as he did. The skin and scales had grown back over it, hiding it, making it look like it was supposed to be that way, but that didn't make it natural.

He wasn't supposed to be here.

Rain wasn't supposed to die.

But he was still here, in this cage.

And Rain was still dead, all because of him.

Suddenly, he heard a rumbling that rolled across the sky above his cage. He looked out through the bars just in time to see a streak of light race towards the ground in a silver vein before shooting back up in the clouds as quickly as it had arrived.

Lightning...?

A roll of thunder crossed the sky, a drum that echoed over the dark, dark clouds.

He hadn't seen or sensed a storm. It had been cloudless for many days. It was unexpected.

But not unwanted.

He raised his head, peering up through the bars expectantly.

It started out with only a drop.

It landed lightly on Ink's nose, a tiny circle of cool moisture. Then, another. And another, and another. Soon, the water was pouring down, a heavenly rhythm rumbling along with the soft silver sound of clean water streaming from the sky. More light flashed, followed by another rumbling.

Ink watched it all, listened to it all.

The rumblings that sounded like a dragon. The lightning that seared the sky as fast as dragon flight.

The rain...

Rain....

Ink lowered his head again, resting back against the ground. Clean, clear raindrops poured all over his head, cool and fresh. It slipped over his scales, dripping down and carrying small trails of dirt away from his face.

For the first time in over a decade, Ink felt a tiny smile flicker over his lips.

Rain....Rain....

His eyes slowly slipped closed as he enjoyed the feel of the cool rain on his scales. He gave the sky a final glance, taking in the sight of the mighty black clouds, the silver lightning, and the

metallic water splashing down on him in soft beads, cooling and soothing. Powerful, yet gently watching over him.

Everything I always saw in her...Big sister...

He had finally found his Rain.